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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1105th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 3 August 1995, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. GARVALOV

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Ninth and tenth periodic reports of Mexico (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 4) (continued)

Ninth and tenth periodic reports of Mexico (CERD/C/260/Add.1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.12/Rev.1) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. González Félix, Mr. Gómez-Robledo and Mr. Muñoz-Ledo (Mexico) resumed their seats at the Committee table.

2. Mr. DIACONU commended the detailed report (CERD/C/260/Add.1) submitted by Mexico and the informative oral introduction. Mexico had a positive attitude to problems relating to its indigenous populations and was eager to solve them, not least because the Mexican Constitution recognized indigenous populations as an essential element of society. Mexico acknowledged that there were problems in guaranteeing equal rights for such populations, particularly in the legal, agrarian and labour spheres. The Government had recently taken measures that amounted to positive discrimination, including in the State of Chiapas, in the spirit of article 2, paragraph 2, of the Convention.

3. The conflict that had erupted in Chiapas was symptomatic of a deep-seated problem that was not confined to that area alone. In Mexico, discrimination on grounds of national origin was the result of economic underdevelopment. The remedy thus lay in economic and administrative improvements.

4. The report was slightly contradictory in so far as it stated, in its section on the implementation of article 4, that Mexico did not need to enact legislation in order to prohibit racial discrimination because there were no racial problems. However, discriminatory practices were mentioned elsewhere, as in paragraph 214 of the report on the work of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). Mexican legislation needed to be revised and brought into line with the provisions of article 4, so that acts of racial discrimination could be punished under the law.

5. Unfortunately, the report gave few details of the implementation of article 5, which dealt with economic, social and cultural development and equality before the law, subjects that were not without significance in Mexico. The next report should seek to fill that gap.

6. Mr. FERRERO COSTA expressed appreciation for the oral presentation by the delegation of Mexico and Mr. Wolfrum's exhaustive examination of Mexico's tenth periodic report (CERD/C/260/Add.1). Mexico had a commendable track record of reporting to the Committee, unlike many other States parties.

7. The question of indigenous populations was of particular importance to Mexico since it had the largest concentration of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Mexico recognized that there were problems relating to indigenous populations, although it attributed them primarily to economic factors. In paragraph 89, for example, it was acknowledged that indigenous people were often discriminated against in the courts as a result of their economic

marginalization and linguistic difficulties. For historical and structural reasons, indigenous populations lived in inferior social and economic conditions, particularly in rural areas. It was stated in paragraph 161 of the report that "The question of the indigenous population in Mexico is never approached as a problem of racial discrimination but as a matter connected with the right to development and their economic and social marginalization." However, the definition of racial discrimination in article 1 of the Convention was broad enough to categorize the denial of the full economic and social rights of indigenous people in Mexico as a form of racial discrimination.

8. The constitutional reform in 1992 was commendable, in particular the amendment to article 4 on indigenous peoples, which provided that "The law shall protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, usages, customs, resources and specific forms of social organization, and shall guarantee their members effective access to the jurisdiction of the State." The Committee would welcome information on legislation enacted since 1992. Similarly, information not only on indigenous peoples but also on the rest of the Mexican population would be useful.

9. Mexico had provided ample details on measures that had been taken to bring about a solution to the conflict in Chiapas. Mexico's next report should describe any further measures taken in the intervening period. It was reported that economic resources had been allocated to improving the situation there, but no information had been provided on measures to improve analogous situations elsewhere. Paragraph 22 of the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.12/Rev.1) stated that "The 31 States that make up the Republic are free, sovereign and autonomous." What exactly did that mean in practice? In a similar vein, he asked, with reference to paragraph 63 of the core document, for an explanation of how human rights instruments and treaties were incorporated into Mexico's domestic legislation, if there were problems in implementing such instruments in the states of the Federation and if the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination had been thus integrated into domestic legislation.

10. Under article 4 of the Convention, States parties were obliged to enact legislation punishing acts that incited or promoted racial discrimination. Mexico had not done so in the belief that such legislation was not needed, and was therefore failing to fulfil a binding commitment under the Convention and take what was essentially a preventive measure. In connection with article 5, Mexico should in its next report provide much more detailed information on what it was doing to implement it.

11. He asked what measures had been taken to improve the operation of the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs and requested information on the functioning, funding and terms of reference of the National Commission for Comprehensive Development and Social Justice and on how it worked in relation to the National Human Rights Commission. He inquired whether indigenous people were involved in the various institutions' steering committees and leadership, and how they participated in their decision-making processes.

12. With respect to implementation of article 6 of the Convention, he was interested in hearing what steps had been taken to improve recourse for indigenous people against acts of racial discrimination. Paragraph 65 of the core document stated that the National Human Rights Commission "has published documents, some in indigenous languages, to promote respect for human rights". He asked whether the International Convention was among those documents.

13. Paragraph 76 of the report referred to the provision of article 15, VIII (b), of the Penal Code for the Federal District which allowed ignorance of the existence or scope of a law to be used as a defence. Paragraph 97 stated that indigenous people lived under conceptions of the world that occasionally entered into conflict with the laws in force, which suggested a form of defence such as that provided under article 15, VIII (b), but paragraphs 165 and 168 implied that indigenous peoples were often victims of the legal system, encountering serious obstacles in obtaining a fair trial and even being deprived of a translator during the proceedings. Could a person charged with discrimination against a member of the indigenous population in the area of housing or employment use article 15, VIII (b), namely, ignorance of the law concerning racial discrimination, as a defence?

14. Mexico asserted in paragraph 157 of its report that there was no need for legislation to deal with propaganda or organizations of the kind referred to in article 4 of the Convention. How could that assertion be squared with the statement in paragraph 165 to the effect that unpleasant vestiges of discrimination against indigenous peoples were still found? A belief in the non-existence of racial discrimination in the territory of a reporting State did not absolve that State from compliance with article 4, which applied not only to current circumstances but also to future eventualities.

15. Mr. YUTZIS said that under article 4 of the Convention, States parties undertook to adopt immediate and positive measures to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, discrimination. The article was therefore concerned not just with objectives but with results.

16. He intended to present a set of statistics from various sources, focusing on the State of Chiapas, that would provide an insight into the situation of indigenous peoples in Mexico. He had faith in the accuracy of the data but was willing to stand corrected if they were found to be unreliable.

17. Starting with the principle of equity, the national average per capita income, based on gross domestic product (GDP), was US$ 3,000, compared to US$ 1,466 in Chiapas and US$ 8,129 in the Federal District. Over the past decade, GDP in Chiapas had declined by an annual average of 6.5 per cent, the sharpest decline in Mexico. Forty-five per cent of GDP in Chiapas was concentrated in mining and agriculture, branches of activity in which development lagged behind that in other areas, and 58.3 per cent of the economically active population were employed in primary activities. In 1993, the Federal Government had spent a sum of US$ 180 per capita on the population as a whole but only US$ 83 on the population of Chiapas. Some 59 per cent of children of school age in Chiapas had no access to education. The illiteracy rate in persons over 15 years of age, at 30.12 per cent, was triple the national average and the number of persons in the same age group who had not completed primary education was double the national average. The National

Minimum Wage Commission had placed Chiapas in economic category C, which corresponded to a minimum wage of less than US$ 4 per day. In the area of housing, the national average of housing without sanitation facilities was 21.47 per cent, compared with 42.66 per cent in Chiapas. In the area of health, Chiapas had one doctor for every 3,500 persons, compared to 1,500 in some other areas. Trachoma, a chronic contagious disease leading to blindness and which could be cured with soap and water, was endemic in certain communities in Chiapas. The rate of malnutrition was higher than elsewhere and had increased by 641 per cent in recent years; 66.74 per cent of the population of Chiapas were chronically undernourished, with children accounting for 88.6 per cent of that figure. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Chiapas had one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world. Mexico's National Nutrition Institute reported that 51 per cent of 2.8 million indigenous persons under 17 years of age suffered from severe malnutrition. Average life expectancy in Chiapas was considerably lower than for the country as a whole. There had been a marked increase in cancer of the uterus, a disease that could be prevented by providing check-up facilities. Chiapas accounted for 40 per cent of the country's gas production and 21 per cent of electricity production, but 30 per cent of households were without electricity in that State. In 1990, 40 per cent of households and 92 per cent of indigenous households had had no running water. Only 2.96 per cent of the agricultural area of Chiapas was served by irrigation systems.

18. Turning to the subject of land, which was closely bound up with the historical collective and individual identity of Mexico's indigenous population, he said that, according to the most recent agricultural census, 78 per cent of ejido land in Chiapas had not been divided into plots. Twenty families owned the best land. Some 10 years previously, 1,032,000 indigenous persons had owned 823,000 hectares of land, while a single family had owned 121,000 hectares. Six thousand stockbreeding families owned more than 3 million hectares of land, which represented almost one half of the territory of the State of Chiapas.

19. Some observers held that indigenous land tenure had not benefited from the amendment of article 27 of the Constitution because the article had altered the inalienable character of communal property, which had become private property that could be bought and sold. In 1994, over 100 murders related to agrarian problems had been committed and there had also been reports of extrajudicial executions. Land was obviously an extremely complex issue but the report of Mexico contained a section on legal anthropology and he wondered whether steps might be taken to legalize out-of-court settlement of land disputes on the basis of indigenous practices and customs, without prejudice, of course, to formal judicial structures.

20. Social stratification in Latin America was often related to skin colour or ethnic origin. He suggested that the data for Chiapas, which were probably replicated to a lesser degree in other parts of Mexico, indicated that there was a certain correspondence between structural factors conducive to marginalization and the presence of indigenous populations. That type of social stratification therefore came within the mandate of the Committee.

21. Lastly, he noted that some aspects of the situation in Mexico had deteriorated since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The trend towards economic globalization seemed to be inexorable but he wondered whether the application of the economic models associated with NAFTA were reducing or increasing structural marginalization.

22. Mr. LECHUGA HEVIA noted that the supplementary report on Chiapas devoted considerable attention to the question of refugees fleeing conflict areas, but no mention had been made of the abuses allegedly perpetrated by members of the military against the indigenous population. Impunity was a factor conducive to even greater discontent in Chiapas and was a problem that should be addressed by the authorities. He hoped that the next periodic report would state whether those responsible for violations had been brought to justice and punished.

23. Land tenure was a key component of the problem of indigenous populations, not only in Mexico. It was reported that 5 per cent of the population of Chiapas owned all the arable land in the State. The amendment to article 27 of the Constitution seriously affected ejido property. Was it true that the amendment severely restricted the scope for distributing additional land among the indigenous population?

24. The report on Chiapas stated that the employment rate in the State stood at 97.7 per cent, a figure that he found hard to credit, especially at a time of economic crisis. Could the delegation of Mexico confirm the accuracy of that figure?

25. Mrs. SADIQ ALI expressed appreciation for the Country Rapporteur's detailed analysis of Mexico's tenth periodic report. Her queries were based on information relating to Mexico contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (document E/CN.4/1995/77). She was somewhat puzzled by the assertion that discriminatory practices did not exist in Mexico, an assertion made on the grounds that no recommendations on racism or racial discrimination had thus far been issued by the National Human Rights Commission established in 1992. There were subsequent references in the report to a National Commission of Justice for Indigenous People, whose activities were aimed at improving the legal framework with a view to eliminating discriminatory practices through, inter alia, the formation of agrarian conciliation teams for the solution of long-standing inter-community and intra-community disputes. Mention was also made of an Agency for the Defence of Indigenous Rights established as part of an ongoing effort to prevent and, if necessary, punish any violation of ethnic minority rights. She would welcome more information on those bodies and how they functioned. With regard to the latter she inquired whether any action had in fact been taken to punish such violations.

26. Mr. SONG Shuhua said that credit was due to the Mexican delegation for its comprehensive report, and more importantly for its frank attitude and recognition of the existence of racial discrimination in Mexico. Paragraph 19 of the report (CERD/C/260/Add.1) referred to the growth of the indigenous population in recent years. However, he was more concerned about the quality of their life in rural areas. Did the Government envisage any specific

programmes to improve their situation? Unless adequate support was provided, indigenous people would gravitate towards urban areas, which would be unable to handle such an influx. A further matter of concern was the major development projects under way in rural areas, given that the majority of indigenous people depended for their subsistence on the land and its resources. What steps were being taken to ensure that such projects would not upset the ecological balance? Moreover, were the indigenous people's special skills and experience in agriculture being used to good effect in such projects?

27. Having paid a visit to the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs, he was well acquainted with its laudable initiatives and research activities in a variety of fields. However, he wondered how well represented the indigenous population were on the staff of the Institute, particularly among those in positions of responsibility. To what extent did the Government contribute to the Institute and what was the general attitude of the indigenous people towards it?

28. There were many issues underlying events in the State of Chiapas which were well documented in the report, including: poor education and health facilities, lack of access to the land and water resources, not to mention the difficulties experienced by indigenous people in legal proceedings owing to language problems. He inquired what measures the Government was taking to resolve such problems, given the close link between economic issues and racial discrimination. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that events in the State of Chiapas would not have repercussions in other parts of the country.

29. Mr. SHAHI thanked the Mexican delegation for its comprehensive report and, in particular, the detailed additional information provided on the situation of indigenous people in the State of Chiapas. He welcomed the fact that the Government had not delayed in finding a political solution to the conflict in Chiapas, having recognized that the deep-rooted problems stemmed mainly from extreme poverty. Many members of the Committee had highlighted areas in which Mexico had failed to comply with provisions of the Convention. Moreover, Mr. Ferrero Costa had clearly demonstrated that there was racial discrimination against the indigenous population in Mexico, despite the delegation's eloquent attempts to maintain the contrary. None the less, it must be acknowledged that the Government was beginning to address the problem of poverty, having set itself the core objectives of raising standards, inter alia in health, education, housing, sanitation and electricity supply, to average national levels by the year 2000. He hoped that the next periodic report would show substantial progress in meeting those targets and, in particular, on the issues of land tenure and access to resources for the sizeable indigenous population.

30. Mr. GONZALEZ FELIX (Mexico) welcomed the frank and constructive dialogue with the Committee. That had been the aim of the Mexican delegation when submitting a somewhat self-critical report which made no attempt to conceal existing problems and explain action under way to resolve them. From the comments made so far there appeared to be three main areas of concern to the Committee. First, regarding compliance with article 4 of the Convention, he failed to grasp where the problem lay. He concurred with the Committee that there should be no form of discrimination and that people should be equal

before the law. He emphasized that, following the Committee's consideration of the two previous periodic reports, there had been an upsurge of interest in human rights issues in Mexico, which had led to the creation of the National Human Rights Commission and a number of other bodies. The Committee's principal recommendation at that time, to the effect that Mexico should legislate on such matters, had been conveyed to the competent authorities and other bodies concerned. However, in Mexico the indigenous population was viewed in different terms; it was not regarded as a minority that was in some way excluded from society. Most Mexicans were of mixed race and the indigenous population formed the whole basis and essence of the nation. Although it was true that many among the indigenous population were underprivileged and marginalized, many others were better off and held positions of responsibility in public life and society. No political party, non-governmental organization or other body had ever felt the need to take up the issue of discrimination against them. Furthermore, during the past four years no complaints of racial discrimination had ever been submitted to the National Human Rights Commission or for that matter to the Special Rapporteur on Racial Discrimination in the Centre for Human Rights.

31. The basis of the Mexican Constitution (art. 1) was fully in conformity with the spirit of the Convention. Moreover, in accordance with article 133 of the Constitution, following its adoption by the Legislature, the Convention formed an integral part of domestic legislation and could be invoked before all judicial authorities. The Mexican Penal Code also contained an article that punished any violation of constitutional guarantees. As in the past, his delegation would convey the Committee's concerns to the relevant State and civic authorities in Mexico and it was possible that, following events in the State of Chiapas, there would be greater interest in such matters.

32. As to the question whether Mexico's policies and legislation were in line with the Convention, it could not be denied that in some areas there was room for improvement. It was indeed regrettable that certain sectors of the population were placed at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the law. However, it should be noted that around 40 million people in Mexico lived in conditions of extreme poverty. The indigenous people were merely one of the many groups, including women, children, disabled persons and migrant workers, in need of attention. In that connection, he welcomed Mr. Yutzis' remarks, which had highlighted the fact that many of the problems in the State of Chiapas were caused by extreme poverty.

33. Manifestations of racial discrimination normally emerged when one ethnic group claimed superiority over another. Such a situation was made impossible in Mexico by the multicultural and multi-ethnic composition of society, of which the indigenous population formed the very basis. He stressed that their marginalization was not directly linked to racial discrimination, but rather to their poor socio-economic conditions, which the Government was determined to improve. Mexico had one of the largest and best integrated indigenous populations in Latin America. That had been the rationale behind the amendment to article 4 of the Constitution, which recognized Mexico's multicultural legacy and provided for special protection for the indigenous population. So while he understood the concerns expressed by some members of the Committee regarding the experience of other countries in such matters, he could not endorse their approach. Regrettably, the gap between theory and

practice was often greater in developing countries such as Mexico due to the enormous efforts entailed in achieving development. The fact that some indigenous communities were very small made it difficult to ensure that they were all given equal treatment. The Government had identified 56 different ethnic languages, some of which were spoken by only a few hundred people. Such a situation further complicated efforts being made in the areas of health and education. The Government was none the less aware that such groups should be given special attention.

34. As to the specific question raised by the Country Rapporteur about the de facto authority of the Mexican army during the uprising in the State of Chiapas, he pointed out that the conflict had lasted only 11 days. No state of emergency had ever been declared and all inquiries relating to human rights violations had been carried out by civil authorities. The role of the army had merely been to quell any aggression.

35. Mr. MUÑOZ-LEDO (Mexico), responding to specific issues raised by the Country Rapporteur, explained that at the time of the 1950 census the indigenous population of Mexico had resided mainly in rural areas and the Government had been pursuing a policy of integration. Subsequent censuses had focused only on those who spoke indigenous languages.

36. As to article 4 of the Constitution, it had been enacted not in order to root out any manifestations of racial discrimination, but rather to recognize the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of the Mexican nation and to lay the foundations of a new relationship with the indigenous population, setting aside the unsatisfactory concept of integration. It had been revised with a view to clarifying the legislative competence of the Federation, its states and municipalities. Lastly, it was intended to protect the languages, customs and amenities of the indigenous populations, as well as guaranteeing them proper access to justice.

37. Mr. GOMEZ-ROBLEDO (Mexico) said that, under the new Government which had taken office since the preparation of the tenth periodic report, it had been decided that it would probably be of greater benefit to the indigenous population to expand article 4 of the Constitution rather than adopt additional legislation. The reforms of the criminal legislation referred to by Mr. de Gouttes contained provisions for implementing article 4 of the Constitution.

38. It had been asked whether, in order to protect the rights of the indigenous inhabitants, the judge in a case was required to be a member of the same ethnic group as the accused or the plaintiff. Under the Code of Criminal Procedure, the judge was required to be familiar with the background of the accused and the social organization of the indigenous group to which he belonged. That was a form of positive discrimination intended to overcome any disadvantages indigenous persons might suffer. The knowledge required went beyond familiarity with communal structures and ways of life to include indigenous methods of solving disputes, which often differed widely from one people to another. The effort to improve the administration of justice for members of all ethnic groups included not only the training of interpreters in the 56 indigenous languages registered in Mexico, but the appointment of special committees on which both sides were represented to assist judges in

determining the law in cases of conflict between national legislation and the indigenous systems. It was important to stress that all those measures applied to all judicial proceedings at whatever level, and not simply to agrarian matters.

39. Mr. MUÑOZ-LEDO (Mexico), responding to several questions on the effects of the amendments to article 27 of the Constitution on agrarian conditions, said that the 1992 reforms had been aimed at giving legal security to rural property rights, promoting and strengthening the ejidos and indigenous communities, and encouraging the flow of capital to rural areas. The Administration had recognized that there was not enough land available to satisfy all demands and that the accumulation of pending applications was a source of uncertainty, generated false expectations and hampered development. With the reforms, a new legal system had been established aimed at rendering the countryside more productive and promoting justice and well-being among the rural population. The greater legal protection accorded to smallholders did not imply any return to the system of large estates. Section 17 of the amended article recognized the ejidos and indigenous communities as having legal personality, confirmed the systems which they operated as legal forms of property ownership and empowered them to decide for themselves the best way of making use of their land resources.

40. Under the National Development Programme recently adopted by the new Administration, it was proposed to consolidate the implementation of the reforms and the new agrarian legislation. To that end, it was intended to adopt measures to remedy backwardness in agrarian matters once and for all and to improve systems of recognizing and registering agrarian rights. Those measures were part of a wider economic context in which Mexico intended to promote a development strategy based on the privatization of the economy, the promotion of national and foreign investment, and the opening-up of trade as a way of reviving economic growth and integrating Mexico more dynamically into the international market. It was believed that the new agrarian legislation would attract investment to the countryside, help to generate economies of scale, and promote various forms of association between private capital and traditional producers with productive potential.

41. Regarding the agrarian situation in the State of Chiapas, he said that the difficult and complicated process of land distribution was expected to be completed in 1997. By the end of 1995, all pending cases should be ready for submission to the competent State courts. Special working parties had been established which would, it was hoped, make it possible, through dialogue and conciliation, to re-establish conditions for investment in rural areas of Chiapas. A mark of the success achieved by the Government through such innovative mechanisms was that, in the past few months, there had been no invasions of land in Chiapas. In addition, peasant organizations applying for land were being financed by the Federal Government through a system of trusts. Of 60 cases pending in Chiapas in 1994, some 15 had been settled and it was hoped that, by the end of August 1995, 30 more would have been concluded. It was believed that the authorities were now on the right course and land problems in Chiapas would be solved in the next few years.

42. Mr. GOMEZ-ROBLEDO (Mexico), responding to the questions that had been asked about refugees in Chiapas, said that the figure of 50,000 in the tenth periodic report had related to 1982. According to data from UNHCR, there were currently some 35,000 refugees there. The Mexican Government had taken steps to promote the voluntary return of the refugees to their country of origin, in strict compliance with international law. As explained in a recent report to the Economic and Social Council, any delays in the programme of voluntary repatriation had been due to the difficulties encountered by the authorities concerned in providing the refugees with land on their return, continuing security problems and the non-existence of an overall peace agreement. Since then, an agreement on human rights had been concluded between the Government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union whereby some 6,000 refugees had been enabled to return from Chiapas to Guatemala in 1994. It was hoped that a further 10,000 would return in 1995. The situation in Chiapas would not be allowed to affect the repatriation programme. It was hoped that, by the end of 1995, there would be only some 25,000 Guatemalan refugees in Mexico.

43. Mr. GONZALEZ FELIX (Mexico) said that the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INI), established in the 1940s to study the special problems of the indigenous population, was responsible for coordinating the activities of federal and state bodies concerned with such matters. Its programmes extended to all ethnic groups and were not confined to the State of Chiapas. He noted that there were figures in the tenth periodic report calling attention to the situation in states other than Chiapas, such as Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero. The additional report on the situation in Chiapas, also gave data for other states. Serious problems of land rights had arisen in Chiapas precisely because it was, by Mexican standards, a rich state with valuable land and water resources. After the disturbances in Chiapas, the National Commission for Comprehensive Development and Social Justice for the Indigenous Peoples had been established specifically to organize consultations with INI in order to prevent similar outbreaks in other states. Some very important studies had been undertaken in the case of the Tarahumaras in Chihuahua, where the precarious economic situation threatened to create a serious social problem.

44. Mr. MUÑOZ-LEDO (Mexico) said that he would give some figures for the results of the solidarity programme both before and after the outbreak of the conflict in Chiapas. One of the factors most responsible for the marginalization and isolation of Chiapas was the wide dispersal of the population. Unlike the rest of the country, Chiapas retained a high proportion of rural population. Only 40.4 per cent of its inhabitants lived in urban areas, while the national average was 71 per cent. Thus, 59.6 per cent of the population lived scattered in 17,302 localities with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants. Among those, some 12,000 had fewer than 100 inhabitants and 7,000 had 10 inhabitants or less. Though much poverty and backwardness remained in Chiapas, there had been many advances - evidence of the sustained efforts of the Federal Government to overcome decades of neglect. Particular emphasis had been placed on directing more resources to the regions and localities where the indigenous population lived. In 1994, special flexible machinery had been set up to respond to the demands of marginalized groups. To that end, 17 "modules for indigenous and peasant affairs" had been established to deal directly with the requirements and

requests of various social organizations. In nominal terms, social expenditure in Chiapas had increased by 93.3 per cent between 1991 and 1994, and in real terms by 48.6 per cent.

45. For example, between 1991 and 1994 some 185 million new pesos had been spent on building 339 new drinking water systems, supplying some 265,000 persons, and 112 new sewer systems for communities with more than 1,500 inhabitants, which had reached some 190,000 persons. With regard to electrification, the situation had been very bad in Chiapas, despite its major contribution to the generation of power for the rest of the country. In the rural areas, 40 per cent of the population had been without electricity. It was hoped by the year 2000 to reach the national average of 96 per cent coverage. By 1994, the proportion of households without electricity had declined to 20 per cent. Over 900 million new pesos had been spent on roads, more than 1,000 km of new roads being built and 995 km repaired and paved. He was ready to provide the Committee with further figures on education, health, housing, solidarity funds for coffee-growers, contributions to municipal funds, regional development programmes and so on, which would answer a number of other questions that had been asked, as well as the inquiry by Mr. Song regarding the conservation and development of the Forest of Lacandón.

46. Despite the country's financial situation, the new Government was determined to maintain a high level of social expenditure for the period 1995-2000 to the benefit of the neediest of Mexico's inhabitants, including the population of the State of Chiapas. The National Development Programme for the period 1995-2000 established as the target of development policy the full achievement of the social, political and economic aspirations of the Mexican people, which would require action to combat inequalities between the various regions and sectors of the country. The policy was directed at fostering equality of opportunity and conditions that would guarantee the population the enjoyment of the social and individual rights set forth in the Constitution, at improving the well-being and quality of life of all Mexicans, and at giving priority to the elimination of poverty and marginalization. Lastly, the Government's overall policy would help to bring about greater social justice by overcoming backwardness, correcting the imperfections of the market, generating employment, promoting the transfer of resources to persons unable to provide for their own basic needs, and bringing about a better distribution of income and a reduction of economic inequality between persons and regions in Mexico.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.